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AUTHOR Novak, Joan  
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## ABSTRACT

Talk, the foundation stone upon which all development of language is built, provides the basis for literary interpretation and thus has important repercussions in all the areas of reading and writing. Various activities can give high school students the opportunity to talk and to learn from the expression of others. Group discussion offers students chances for self-discovery and for improving argumentative and reasoning skills. Creative drama and role playing can be a form of practice in living, serve as releases from tension and fears, and provide an impetus to the development of the imagination. Talk plays an important part in adding vitality to literature study so that students explore both the author's ability to present experience meaningfully and their own personal experiences in a similar area. (JH)

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TALK AND THE TEACHER OF ENGLISH:

Use of Oral Language in the High  
School

A Paper Presented by:

JOAN NOWAK

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At the Annual Conference  
of the Canadian Teachers  
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I've been asked to present a paper on the topic of Talk in the Teaching of English: Use of Oral Language in High School. Incidentally, my friends and family heartily approved of the topic I had been given. They all told me that I must know a lot about the topic since I seem to do so much of it.

And perhaps this is one of the greatest failings of teachers as a body that we tend to take over the classroom with our verbosity and often fail to have the patience or insight to let things come from the students themselves.

Schools are under a good deal of criticism these days on various counts. Paul Goodman claims that schools are causing our children to "grow up absurd." John Holt says that "Most children fail . . . fail to develop more than a tiny part of the tremendous capacity for learning, understanding and creating with which they were born and of which they made use during the first two or three years of their lives." In fact, Holt prefaces his book with an interesting little quotation from William Hull, "If we taught children to speak, they'd never learn."

A recent, more moderate critic, George Brown, claims that "Much of the vitality of our curriculum has been lost through our traditional treatment of it. Educators, by compressing and organizing knowledge in all areas of the curriculum have created in the classroom what Paul Tillich has called, "the fatal pedagogical error," "to throw answers like stones at the heads of those who have not yet asked the questions." Not only has this reinforced a pathological condition of failing to sense where the students are when we work with them, but it has had a significant negative effect on cognitive learning itself.

Closer to home, Peter Moss, a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, writing in Classmate, Manitoba's Journal for teachers of English (Vol. 3, Fall '72) makes similar charges specifically about the teaching of English in schools, stating that "The teaching of English is still largely considered in terms of the traditional categories of language and literature. This,

despite the upsurge of interest in the last few years in the role which talk plays in classroom activities . . . The study of both literature and language assumes that words take meaning from context and the person to whom they are addressed, and thus both pre-suppose a broader study of people talking together, thinking aloud, reading." Yet Moss's informal survey of education faculties shows that little attention is being given to any systemized teaching of oral language and its use in the schools to education students.

I think it is fair to say that the aim of English teaching should be "the personal development and social competence of the pupil." Perhaps it's time we looked at the relevance of talk to personal development and social competence and some of the ways talk may be employed and enriched in the teaching of secondary students.

Talk is actually the foundation stone upon which all development of language is built. It provides the bridge across which the child must pass in going from the social and shared mode of communication to the private, written domain. Nor is this a one-step operation accomplished merely by providing the child with the tools of reading and writing. It is a process of growth for which some children have been better prepared than others and for which all children need extensive preparation. Talk also provides the basis for literary interpretation and thus has important repercussions in all the areas of reading and writing.

Years ago, when I was an elementary student, the class inevitably sat in rigid rows and were told to sit up straight and not talk; that was the teacher's job. I remember being lined up with the others at the end of each month to take new seats. You were called into line in the order of your standing in class; top-ranking students first, down to the painful last minutes when the class tag-alongs or "failures" were called to their places. This was the traditional school and it reflected a traditional hierarchical view of the world. There is still much of this present in our schools, but there is also a hopeful and wholesome movement toward education based on the assumption that children want to learn and will learn in their

fashion, in which respect for and trust in the child are basic principles and in which analysis of exactly what kinds of knowledge or skills are truly essential to the fullest education of each individual is an ongoing thing.

We who are strongly book-oriented, as I imagine are most, if not all of us here, find it hard to imagine a world almost completely oriented to speech, such as the one which existed before the printing press. Marshall McLuhan points out that "the printed word" has become a central force in the shaping of modern society, but during the last 30 years in particular the primacy of the spoken word has become more and more evident because of the growth of technology that emphasises speech communication. Just look at our modern world; first the telephone and radio, then TV, communication satellites, and electronic communication have come to play a more and more important role in the daily lives of virtually everyone in our society. Not that talk ever really ceased to be important — rather, the growing emphasis on speech in communication and the varying and powerful ways it can be used must cause us to re-focus on its significance in today's world. The technology of spoken communication not only provides us with fresh and vivid perceptions of the world, but may in fact have created what some call "a new man" capable of thinking, perceiving, and integrating information in ways totally new and sometimes profoundly disturbing. Such ongoing change in our culture must be reflected in the whole approach we use in dealing with the child in the school.

Many adolescents claim that they feel "out of it" when it comes to traditional studies. As one student put it, "you sit there and close up your mind after awhile, and you do the exact same thing to yourself and everyone around you that they're doing to you. They don't listen to your opinions and then you don't listen to theirs, and that's just as bad, really." (P. 206 Weinstein). The only experience of significance to students is one they can relate to their own concerns and self-concept. And the trouble with the traditional approach to English is that it excludes so much that is rich in that student's own experience. I'd like to share with you a selection one of my students wrote in a unit on mass-media. I see this

poem as the expression of a very real problem in modern life, a feeling of lack of "connectedness" between people:

BROTHER

I SAW A MAN ON THE STREET,  
IT WAS MY BROTHER,  
I KNEW I KNEW HIM, AND I KNEW I LOVED HIM,  
BUT DO I REALLY KNOW HIM?

Coming, from the office, after working with computers the whole day, I realize the hopelessness. What have they done to bring me close to my brother? He sits across from me, we don't talk. Him thinking his private thoughts, and me wondering what they are. All the expanse of knowledge on those great machines, the computers, doesn't help me now. I can't relate to him.

I KNOW THAT HE LOVES ME  
AND,  
I KNOW THAT I LOVE HIM  
BUT,  
RARELY DOES IT SHOW  
OR,  
AM I JUST USED TO IT?

After going on a trip on one of those supersonic jets, he phones, long distance, home. He talks to each one of us, separately, saying rather the same thing. Saying nothing. If he would only tell something from inside himself it would be special, interesting, worthwhile hearing. A clearer voice from even better equipment, a telegraph, a letter, it would still be the same. Ordinary. Blah.

GROWING UP TOGETHER,  
PLAYING TOGETHER,  
NOTHING NOW,  
WE DON'T PLAY ANYMORE,  
YOUNGER,  
WE HAD SECRETS,  
WE HAD A BOND,  
OLDER,  
KEEP TO YOURSELF,  
NOTHING NOW.

This is getting meaningless, this whole rat-race.  
And don't come to my door trying to see me a tape-  
recorder, electric knife, or some other new  
mechanical device. I don't want them. I want  
something else.

HE IS THERE  
AND  
I AM HERE  
AND  
THAT'S IT.

Watching an intellectual programme on the idiot  
box, we sit, like dried out vegetables that even  
the countries in need won't take, listening to a  
voice as it drones on, telling us of the achieve-  
ments of space ships. What relevance does this  
have to my problems? Why am I listening? Why  
am I not trying? I sense that you want to speak  
out, tell me your thoughts, tell me about you, but  
something holds you back. Be sure. Keep to  
yourself. Commuting back to earth the astronaut  
mechanically relates the important details. I  
wonder where his brother is?

Andrea Kerr

Unless the child can perceive some connection between a given body of knowledge and his own background of experience and self-awareness, any knowledge he gains will matter little and be retained even less, nor will it significantly alter behavior. In many schools, curriculum is based more on the requirements of a subject discipline than on the needs of the student. A gap exists between educational practice and those fine sounding professed aims I quoted earlier.

Children come to school limited in the roles they can play and the situations they can cope with. As far as language is concerned, we can see the school as a special opportunity to meet a wide variety of situations and to take on a wide variety of roles within them. This demands much varied talk in many kinds of group situations. Such work helps the child learn to draw on levels and features of language that will help him assimilate and control new experiences.

The importance of being able to speak well is, of course, linked with the equally vital ability to listen intelligently and discriminately. This can be termed "Reciprocal Speech," in which the speaker creates not only his own speech, but to some extent the speech of his listener. Talk is closely connected with ability in oral comprehension. On occasion, request your students to re-state the point made by the previous speaker to that speaker's satisfaction before going on to state their own points.

We need, in fact, to re-shape the whole concept of language and its place in individual development. We live in an age of "future shock" of ever-increasing geographical and social mobility, of increasing emphasis upon oral communication of increasing pressures for a higher level of education in almost every field of increasing demands from the deprived people of society for a fair share of the "good things" of life and of increasing need for inner resources in order to face increasing complexity and make good use of leisure time. We must use an approach directly relevant to the problems and concerns of young people, one which will broaden experience, provide a basis. This approach should be based on the most comprehensive level, that of talk. The Newsom Report makes

this very clear:

. . . of all the different aspects of English, speech has by far the most important contribution to make to the personal and social development of the pupil. Inability to speak fluently is a worse handicap than inability to read and write. . . Of central importance is the need to ensure that students can speak easily, clearly, and with interest and have something important to talk about. Personal and social adequacy depend upon being articulate; that is, upon having the words and language structures with which to think, to communicate what is thought, and to understand what is heard or read. The pupils need in school experiences which will not only help them find the words, but also give them confidence to express them.

The amazing thing about this whole opposition of traditional teaching methods and the oral, experiential or "inquiry" approach is that teachers who have been employing the latter are finding that an improvement in oral ability inevitably brings an improvement in writing ability. The objection that this approach is slower is not valid, for now much literary ability has a pupil who has only learned to re-echo someone else's opinions on a work because he has not developed sufficient sensitivity to trust his own response? And how much validity has an approach of which the result is an outright rejection on the part of many students, of any reading of poetry or literature in their own time or after they leave school? Susan Lund puts it well in her poem:

"THE PEOPLE I MEET"

. . . frustrated  
 With themselves, spreading  
 Frustration  
 Wherever they go. Bored with  
 Themselves,  
 Spreading boredom wherever  
 They go.  
 There they go  
 With no conversation . . .

Before I go on, it should be made clear that I am not advocating tossing out the standard curriculum. Because most of the curriculum is founded on human experience, human dimensions can become the focus of classroom learning. The aspects of talk and discussion and of how the learner feels can be integrated with what the schools believe he should know. This integration can not only increase his desire to know, but also assure that his learning will be meaningful and a more complete personal experience.

Clearly, then, we need to create more room than we have in the past for the specific inclusion of Talk in the teaching of English. Now I will deal with how a teacher might implement activities aimed at giving students the opportunity to talk and to learn from the expression of others. I'll discuss this under three headings:

- 1) Group Discussion
- 2) Creative Drama and Role Playing
- 3) Literature and the Mass Media

1) Group Discussion

Talk can only be enriched through providing abundant opportunities to practice speaking, in an uncritical atmosphere at first. The teacher begins by breaking the class down into small groups on every possible occasion. Talk arises in the course of doing things together.

It is essential that the teacher begin with what will interest his students, that he suggests work that is related to their concerns and that he structure activities to the extent required by the group. His role is to organize and give direction to their talk, but it is important that the discussion be discovery on the pupil's part and that talk be by the pupils and with them rather than at them. From a beginning in familiar areas the teacher must provide new areas of experience, both within the classroom through activities encompassing drama, literature, films, class media, current affairs and so on and outside the school through field trips, interviews, surveys and projects of all kinds. In all these activities, the aim should be to widen the range of situations in which the student uses language.

In a discussion situation, the student proves that he has made the work his own in an important way. A student can write essays by repeating what the teacher or a book says. But, when he is led through open discussion to insights about, say, the values at issue in a novel, or an understanding of what a character did or might have done differently, he makes the insight more truly his own, something he is not likely to do with the same intensity in written work, which is a private communication between himself and usually only one other person, the teacher. As well, any insights he does achieve through essay-writing remain separate; they are seldom communicated to the rest of the class and thus are not acted upon, reinforced, or modified by the point of view of others. The two activities, essay-writing and discussion, are distinct and serve different purposes.

The process of self-discovery through discussion is an important one. As one student put it, discussion "helped me to know myself and to realize that there are different parts of me, that I had to say were good, just for the simple fact that they were my own." (Weinstein, pg. 210) In terms of rational development it plays an equally important role. Rational discussion is a skill that can be taught only through the actual process of discussion itself. Just as in learning to read, the child can read only as a further upward step in development after he has learned to talk, in the same way logical arrangement of thought is best learned orally before it can be carried over into written work.

I have mentioned two important growth areas which may be stimulated through the use of discussion: the emotional and the rational. Discussion may be seen as having more than one style and intent, then, though a group may move from one kind to another in the course of a single time block.

On the one hand is the free discussion with possible expression of feelings, emotions and aspiration in which people are free to ramble along and experiment with concepts, suggestions and imaginative notions. There is freedom to suggest ideas and to mull them over without worrying about whether they hang together or fit the agenda. Teachers tend to be concerned about the value of such an activity. Is anything happening to anybody in this talk?

Usually there is a slow evolution that is one of the forms learning may take, a circularity in discussion, but progress as a kind of spiral, a returning to and refocussing on important concerns, from general comment to the narrative of particular experiences and back again. At the very least the student learns to recognize what he already knows, feels, and has in common with the group. He gains feelings of satisfaction and worth from participation in the group.

On the other hand, discussion may be generated with the specific intent of improving argumentative and reasoning skills. Here is stressed the need to keep to a main issue, to move in a logical step-by-step way through a topic. This type of discussion may be undertaken through the use of pre-trained group leaders whose job it is to help the group stay on track, to give everyone a chance to contribute and to develop various reasoning skills to aid the group in reaching its goal. The group discussion may be taped, so that the teacher can listen to how the discussion went in each group. The tapes can then be played over and the group helped to analyze the progress of discussion, possibly through the use of a rating scale listing characteristics or by analyzing the various categories of discussion techniques used. (See Appendix). What alternative arguments could have been used? What goals did the group achieve or fail to achieve in its discussion?

Specific training in the techniques of rational discussion can be a central component in units dealing, for example, with value issues. Some teachers prefer to teach critical thinking as an ongoing process, by means of example and question during routine class discussion. We all do this to some extent, when for example, we ask a student to define more clearly the terms he is using or check him on a contradiction apparent in his argument. Others have found it helpful to provide specific training in basic logical processes and evaluation of argument, such as that found, for example, in the series by Robbie Case, Thinking Critically, published by The Book Society of Canada. I have used the series not as work-books (as their format intends) but as a teacher guide and source of examples for class use. Case sets out four basic types of criticism to be used in evaluating a particular argument for a factual situation in which someone is suggesting a remedy for a problem:

- 1) Is the author's description of the present situation accurate?
- 2) Is the author's evaluation of the situation (his judgement of approval or disapproval) acceptable?
- 3) Would the author's proposed action really accomplish what he thinks it would?
- 4) Would the author's proposed action have any side-effects which he has not mentioned?

The four lines of criticism are then applied to simple arguments. I'll give you an example or two of the types of arguments used for analysis at an early level:

Ex. 1 "The days of good sportsmanship in professional competition are rapidly disappearing.

The penalties for rule infractions at least in body contact sports such as football, basketball and hockey should be made at least twice as severe as they are at present."

Ex. 2 "If you go into many high schools today, you will find that the students look sloppier than if they had just finished digging a ten-mile ditch.

Uniforms should be instituted in these schools and strict rules made about cleanliness and grooming."

Through discussion the student is led to apply the four-point evaluation of the argument and come up with his own criticism of the author's viewpoint. The notion of general principles is then introduced and it is suggested that people often base their specific arguments and proposals upon such general principles. Things are not right or wrong in themselves, they are right and wrong only when judged by some standard. This makes a difference in how the four types of critical questions should be answered. For example, in discussing Question 1, whether or not the author's description of a situation is accurate, it is important to pay close attention, not only to the facts, but also to the way the author has described them; to the definitions he assumed and the value-laden adjectives he has used. These hidden features of a description can prejudice one's judgement by determining which value principle one will use to judge the situation. Define "life" in one way and abortion may

seem evil. Define it another way and it may be seen as a valid and humanistic approach to a specific human situation.

The pupil is taught to look at points such as the following:

- the general principle underlying, though possibly not openly stated, in a person's judgement of a situation: and the possibility that two general principles may be in conflict or that there are valid exceptions to every general principle.
- often compromise is necessary. The way for this can be paved by understanding where disagreement lies; either in basic principles or in the priority attached to basic principles.

I have used this preparation approach with a class of Grade XII General students, who are generally the less able students. Since my time with them was limited, we spent a relatively brief time on the basics of rational evaluation and then moved on to apply it to a difficult and complex problem which had come up in several of the small group discussions, that of the likelihood of human survival in the light of the massive problems the world faces in terms of over population, food shortage, industrialization and disappearing resources. We had a speaker come to present us with statistics and the basic argument presented in the book, Limits to Growth and students, on their own, did reading and research on the problems involved, giving some of their findings in class presentations. A major essay was the final assignment; most showed definite improvement in terms of logical argument and organization as compared with earlier work. There was a definite carryover from the discussion to the written work. Another year I think it would be profitable to carry out such a unit near the beginning of the year with more able students as well, since logical organization and examination of argument seems to be a common problem at all levels.

One way which you have probably all used to motivate students to work meaningfully in discussion groups is to require them to set up their own projects or class presentations in consultation with the teacher, at the same time providing them with wide choice of interesting topics and materials. I'm sure many of you

have used this approach, as I have, with a wide range of students of differing ability.

My department head, Esther Kiernan, and I had a rather illuminating experience with a class at the Grade XII General Level. Perhaps this experience stands out clearly since these students are often so much harder to motivate than the regular classes.

In this particular instance, we began teaching a composition unit using the standard composition text with each of our groups. The text used examples of various kinds of writing requiring the student to analyze and write different styles for different purposes (Techniques of Good Writing). As I looked out over the class during a routine exercise, I could not help but feel dismayed by the obvious boredom and inattentiveness of the class. The next day we scrapped the composition text and embarked on discussion periods based on a book we had not used previously, called What Do You Think? The book uses a thematic approach, using short contemporary selections written in different styles and chosen from different media, including newspapers, magazines, book and even an occasional cartoon or comic strip to illustrate themes such as "The Happiest Days of Your Life" (the student in school) and "Affluence and Apathy". The latter section, for instance, includes the poem, "Canada: Case History" by Earl Birney, an editorial entitled "Gifts to Spoil the Teenagers" and "Why Bother To Tell the Cops?", which relates one person's frustrating and eventually unsatisfactory attempt to bring police action against a purse-snatcher. The students decided which units they thought would be most interesting. This took some time because many of them hated to stop reading long enough to vote. Selected items were read in class and discussed in small groups with follow-up in the class group. Films, records and other readings were used to expand the theme. The students thoroughly enjoyed the discussion periods, getting deeply and heartily involved. Finally they chose a project to be presented either in a written report or a class presentation.

Some amazing things developed in this formerly apathetic class. Not everyone did brilliant work or even completed the assignments, but the majority, including several who had really been dragging their feet, approached the assignment with real enthusiasm. Three girls did an attitude survey regarding money. Why is money

important to you as an individual? For security? Prestige? How often and for what purposes do you use a credit card? Their findings were charted and presented to the class, along with their critical comments and judgements (they were very hard on people who depend heavily on credit cards!). A written report of high quality was submitted by the group leader, a girl who to that date had submitted not a single written piece of work and who subsequently completed her year successfully.

Another young man, who had been out of school working for a couple of years, started the year virtually unable to write a complete sentence. He claimed that he hated English with a vengeance and that the act of writing was sheer agony to him. During the course of this unit, he approached me one day with several sheets of paper in his hand asking me rather shyly whether I would care to read a couple of short poems he had written. I could hardly believe my ears, but managed to reply casually enough that I would indeed be interested. He had written on an idea that came up during discussion of a student-written poem, "If All The World Could See", that of the difference in people's view of an issue depending on their view of the world. This student became more interested in the work of the classroom, worked with me individually on basic writing skills, and became a great Hemingway fan. The following year he came back to see me after having travelled for six months through Morocco and various parts of Europe. He had kept a daily journal of all his travels, writing sometimes quite extensively about his travels. He told me that the work in English class, particularly in the above unit, represented a real awakening for him to the value of reading and writing as a personal interest.

Still another group, this time three boys, decided to dramatize the story, "Why Tell The Cops?" and present it on tape. They discovered this to be far more work than they had anticipated, but through discussion they evolved a suitable script and spent most of one weekend at one boy's house completing taping, which was, by the way, of very good quality.

These are only a few examples of work which took place during this unit and this from a group which has been almost completely apathetic. I think there were a number of factors that appealed

to them:

- They enjoyed the ongoing communication in class. Students came to feel that they really knew each other and their teachers as individuals. This is very important to students attending a large city school such as ours.
- The subject material dealt in a vital way with topics and real-life experiences which were meaningful to these young adults. Yet the topics were developed by means of academically sound materials, including poetry, prose and narrative.
- There was a genuine sense of achievement when the projects were presented in class. Because the groups chose their own projects and were given teacher guidance, they worked at their own level at a topic that interested them. As well, seeing and hearing the work of other groups provided further opportunity for discussion, and supplied a backlog of experience to aid perception of the issues and further practice in language skills.

I'll move on to my second topic . . .

## 2) Creative Drama and Role Playing

Drama is one of the most affective ways of helping children attain skill in the use of oral language. Brian Way outlines his views on the use of drama in the English program:

A basic definition of drama might be simply 'to practice living', part of which is to be able to talk confidently and easily within ordinary human communication, putting one's own thoughts and feelings and imaginings into one's own words, and at the same time being able to listen to and enjoy the communication of others.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Brian Way, Development Through Drama (Longman, 1967) p. 119.

Drama can be a form of practice in living, then, providing children from a restricted background with an opportunity to play out many roles and situations and to enlarge his own personal resources and understanding.

Drama can also serve as a release from tension and fears by allowing the child to examine in a relatively safe way the anxieties and problems that he usually uses energy to repress. In this way the child gains a measure of control over his fears and is helped to structure his experience and possibly develop alternatives he can actually use.

Creative drama and improvisation also provides an impetus to the development of the imagination. Improvisation involves creative effort: the use of speech and action to communicate ideas and feelings; the imaginative use of objects close at hand as props, costumes and even characters; the development of cues for other actors. Through the dramatic experience the child can come to a deeper understanding of others and can lead to a desire to communicate the experience as he has lived it.

Improvisation and creative drama differ from staging a play for an audience in several important ways:

- Improvisation is the spontaneous acting out of a situation by members of the group.
- Group members set the stage by naming the people in the cast and deciding on the specific situation. How each character will act, however, is determined by that character.
- The situation should be described sufficiently to make the problem clear. Try to build on spontaneous reactions to the situation.
- Role playing differs from putting on a skit in that only the beginning of the scene is planned. When the roles develop spontaneously, the possibility of real emotions being expressed is increased.
- Children are more comfortable in roles they choose themselves. When there is an unfavourable role, assign it to someone who is secure in the group.

- The teacher can stop the action once the situation is clearly defined. This is a good time for discussion of the issues portrayed or for making suggestions about how the scene could be improved or for alternative directions the scene could take.
- Using role playing requires that the teacher as well as the students reacts spontaneously to what has been presented. You cannot plan all your questioning ahead of time. This can be an advantage in that the situation becomes more vital and read both you and you students.

The basic ideas of role-playing is not that a play be produced for an audience, but that the whole class become involved. This has important implications in terms of its impact on students. Because they are not expected to perform for other people, even shy students are freed to take part. Class interaction improves as well. I have found simple role-playing to be one of the most effective ice-breakers with a new class because students have a chance to talk and interact on a personal level, so that in later class discussion the fear of entering into oral discussion is reduced.

One of the most successful units I have taught was a unit in which I taught Hamlet by means of a creative drama approach. A six week block of time was devoted to this unit and for the first two weeks we did not use the text at all. Instead, the students role-played situations parallel to the main ones in Hamlet, but in contemporary terms. The teacher, starting with a basic situation, e.g., a young man caught up in a corrupt power situation, shapes the direction of development by building on situations created by the students which fit in with the general line of the Shakespearean themes and situations. Modern parallels of the corrupt power theme in Hamlet might include the Mafia organization, an extortion racket or a corrupt political situation. All the major scenes are enacted, but not necessarily in the same sequence as the Shakespearean ones. Emphasis is placed on the affective elements and the complexity of the human relationships.

Involving students in the direct creation of the dramatic sequence is useful in helping them understand why Shakespeare uses certain dramatic conventions such as the soliloquy. Have them suggest and try other means of conveying Hamlet's inner thoughts. My students suggested that he could be writing in his diary or talking to a friend or confessing to a priest. We acted out all of these alternatives; then we tried the soliloquy. It was obvious to the students what worked best.

Having students experience what it feels like to be the character in a given situation also helps to clarify some of the more difficult-to-accept elements of Shakespearean characterization. A common reaction to Ophelia and her willingness to turn away from Hamlet upon her father's command is that she is contemptible because of her apparent spinelessness, and to some extent unbelievable. When my students had constricted the Mafia organization, however, they realized that Ophelia's reaction was not only believable, but highly probable. The play gained in credibility in their eyes.

Once all major scenes had been improvised, we moved to the text, reading the main scenes aloud in class and comparing their development and detail with that of our class-created scenes. Understanding of the flow of events, and even of the language, seemed to have been facilitated by the role-playing.

Finally, the class broke into two groups to work on a finished presentation of excerpts from the play. Although they were free to choose to do their presentation in either modern or Shakespearean language, both groups chose to use Shakespeare's words. Why? Because "he says it better."

Student evaluation of this unit was very favourable. By using language first at their own level to explore the basic situations, students were enabled to deal more adequately with Shakespearean language, characterization, and dramatic conventions.

I have given only two examples of situations in which role-playing is of value but it can be useful in both incidental situations and for major units. I have used it, for example, in teaching the concept of point-of-view in literature and in developing grammatical and historical concepts, as well as in the teaching of drama itself.

### 3) Literature and the Mass Media

Talk plays an important part in adding vitality to literature. All literature should be dealt with in a meaningful context, possibly as one facet of thematic development or as a fitting comment on a particular problem or situation. Poems, stories and prose should be read aloud frequently. Discussion of literary works is important, not so much as it deals with factual comprehension but in relation to response, the author's ability to present experience meaningfully and in relating it to the student's personal experience in a similar area. I'll use two examples of how discussion groups might be utilized in teaching one form of literature, the short story.

- a) Discussion groups may follow a set of assigned questions a story of the "Human Dilemma" type, in which a human problem is presented with the solution (if any) left open. A useful set of such stories has been published in Canada. Various categories of questions are included, first, discussing the dilemma, presented in the story and suggesting possible alternative solutions and the problems each involves, then, expanding the dilemma, bringing in issues of more general concern related to the one described in the story and finally, discussing analogies to the original situation and thus testing adherence to general principles which were set out in dealing with the original dilemma. The author suggest the stories

"may be used in a variety of ways in or out of the classroom. Some groups may wish to role play the process of reaching a decision on the story, for example, through a simulated courtroom procedure, a jury panel, or a dramatization of the story and its alternative outcomes. The stories also could be used as a basis for full class

discussion and analysis led by the teacher or a designated discussion leader. Within this framework the teacher or discussion leader may alternate among different roles: as chairman, as a reflector of discussants' views, as Socratic questioner and prober of discussants' positions, or as an equal participant arguing his own position. Small, leaderless discussion groups may use the stories to explore their ideas about a variety of social and personal issues.

The purpose of the discussion should not be to arrive at an answer or to solve a problem. Rather, the purpose should be to explore the complexities of the issues and to gain a clearer understanding of each individual's views on the issues. The discussion group, with or without a leader, should work to keep the issues and debate open rather than to seek premature consensus."

- b) Mary Stevens, writing in the *Confluent Education Workbook*, describes one way to handle the teaching of the short story at a Grade VIII or IX level, so as to involve students in group work and discussion. She begins with a few exercises to help students feel comfortable with each other, briefly goes over the terms used in dealing with short stories (point of view, setting, etc.), and shows students where they can find these terms in their text when they need them. The story assigned in this case was Jack

London's "To Build a Fire". Following is Mrs. Stephens' lively account of what takes place:

With the finish of a general class reading (twice for some), I form groups of four or five, making each group contain one strong personality in it, aggressive, but not necessarily intellectual. I then offer the class a list of problems (these can be dittoed in many combinations) such as:

Setting - Are you there? How can words make you feel cold? What words does the author choose NOT to use? What patterns of words can you find? How do they help the reader BE in the story?

Characterization - How does the author make you see this human being merely by putting a number of words in a certain order? What kinds of information does he leave to the reader's imagination? Why? How does this effect the story? In Jack London's story, the main character is nameless. Why? Does the author seem to be making a judgement about his character? Sympathetic? Biased? How? With what ideas or words? Again, what ideas or words does he omit to "stack his case?"

(The terms used in literary criticism are known to all English teachers. I have suggested only two and how they might be used by students to engage in some problem solving. The important thing is to have many, many such ideas ready, ranging in difficulty from

simple to complex, keeping in mind the varying levels of abilities in the class.)

I have made no effort to appoint a chairman (as I call him). When there appears to be no action or too much, invariably someone or all will complain. No one wants to work, or everyone is going off and doing his own thing or trying to get everyone else to do it. I then suggest that perhaps some kind of structure is necessary to meet the deadline (what???) which is some time before we finish this particular story, when each group must teach the class that which they discovered in their own work, test the class (this is always rigid), grade their work (if they decide to have grades, and most do) and enter the grades in the book. Whatever was happening before, some kind of cohesiveness begins to form.

Now the students generally ask for some directions: How will WE be graded? Here I ask for some kind of an evaluation of themselves and how they succeeded and where they think they failed. They also ask how to teach. I suggest objective tests (and point out their limitations), essay tests (and the difficulty of assessing them), oral presentations, filmed materials, dittoed materials, tests written on the board or taped ahead of time, decide who will grade, how grades will be determined, how the "teachers" will deal with complaints from the class. Surprisingly enough, while all of the work engenders a great deal of interest,

the testing truly absorbs them. Why not? It is what they worry about the most and about which they have the least to say.

I was surprised at the maturity with which grading (and judging papers) was handled. Everyone had, not only a grade, but also some comments on problems and good points in the answers. Learning took place in arguments about what the writer said and what he meant! I believe these group projects were truly exciting experiences for the students of these classes. In teaching, I am sure they learned.

I think I can say for all of us that teaching is indeed one of the best ways of learning, both about ourselves and about our students. What I've learned is that students want teachers who accept the value of the reality they see outside the classroom; they want the opportunity to report their observations, engage in debate and discussion and interpret and evaluate life's meaning. John Steinbeck tells of one such teacher:

"She aroused us," he says, "to shouting, book-waving discussions. We could never stick to the chanted recitation of memorized phyla. Our speculation ranged the world. She breathed curiosity into us so that we brought the facts or truths shielded in our hands like captured butterflies. I have had many teachers who told me soon forgotten facts, but only three created in me a new thing, new attitude, a new hunger. What deathless power lies in the hands of such a person!"

(Baughman M. Dale, Educator's Handbook of Stories, page, 314)

As teachers, let us never forget the life power we hold in our hands.

APPENDIX 1 : SELECTED DISCUSSION ANALYSIS CATEGORIES

- (1) Definition
- (2) Specification (evidence or example)
- (3) Analogy
- (4) Issue stating (factual; definitional; policy or value)
- (5) General Principle or Value
- (6) Qualification or Weighing
- (7) Distinction
- (8) Relevance
- (9) Consistency/Inconsistency
- (10) Summarization
- (11) Stipulation
- (12) Concession
- (13) Agenda-Setting
- (14) Recognition of Need for Information
- (15) Premising (Conditional)
- (16) Source/Authority

APPENDIX 2: Levin's Scale for Group Discussion

DISCUSSION RATING SCALES: OTHER CHARACTERISTICS  
THAT MIGHT RELATE TO QUALITY

|                              |     |       |      |
|------------------------------|-----|-------|------|
| (1) CLARITY OF EXPRESSION:   | LOW | _____ | HIGH |
| (2) SENSITIVITY:             | LOW | _____ | HIGH |
| (3) CONTINUITY:              | LOW | _____ | HIGH |
| (4) RELEVANCE                | LOW | _____ | HIGH |
| (5) MUTUAL INQUIRY BEHAVIOR: | LOW | _____ | HIGH |
| (6) DISAGREEMENT:            | LOW | _____ | HIGH |
| (7) EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT:   | LOW | _____ | HIGH |
| (8) REPETITION:              | LOW | _____ | HIGH |